GT Interview

IR: Tell me the types of digital devices you are familiar with and how often you use them.

GT: Smartphone and a laptop. I use my Smartphone for an average of six hours a day and my laptop for about three or four hours.

IR: Which features, software, or applications do you use your mobile phone for?

GT: On my phone, I use, direct calls, and mainly social media, I spend pretty much of the time using social media. I also use apps like banking apps and I use email as well. Composing and receiving email. I also have the DigID app on my phone. That is actually on my laptop. I use my computer for accessing language learning resources for example. I watch videos and so on. There are also online available books that I access with my computer. That's it, I guess. I use Microsoft packages mainly Microsoft Word. I download images on my phone. But if it is a document for example in PDF version I download them on my computer.

IR: What does integration mean for you? So far how was the integration process for you?

GT: Personally I understand integration first and foremost, is when I am able to speak the language here. When I speak, I mean when I am able to adequately communicate using the language. Secondly, I would say understanding their culture. For example taking part in celebrations that are different from where I come from, like a new year for example. Just simply if I start to be part of their holidays and stuff. You will find yourself to be part of their community or culture. So to conclude, I say I am integrated if I can speak the language. I still feel like a foreigner here, because I am still learning the language. But I guess I would be able to say if I am integrated or not once I mastered the language.

IR: Have digital skills played a role in your integration process? If so, can you elaborate on how? Do you feel that digital technologies have helped or hindered your integration into Dutch society? Can you provide specific examples?

GT: About digitalization, many things require you to be digitally proficient in this country. It can be in making appointments, or almost everything related to your immigration status. Getting a BSN and everything works through appointments which are mostly done online. I can't say I am integrated enough just because I can navigate through digital networks easily, I don't how to put it simply, I don't think being digitally literate makes you integrated here. Because that is just one aspect of it.

But obviously, my digital skills make it easier for me to understand and use the systems here, I mean for example if I want to apply for a job I may not

need to go to the office in person. I can do it online simply. And also, using social media, maybe that can make it easier for me to learn the language, the culture, the work ethic, and so on. In that sense, it can be helpful.

IR: How do you currently use digital technologies to access information about your rights and obligations as a refugee in the Netherlands?

GT: About rights and responsibilities, I learn that mainly from Kowa. Kowa is the organization that administers and manages the refugee camps. So basically the IND oversees our immigration status, like they are the ones who decide on that. But Kowa facilitates our stay here, like they provide food, accommodation, and arrange appointments and everything. They have a website and also an application called My Kowa, so I access information from these resources. Also, there is an IND website, in which I use the relevant information necessary for my process. You can also use social media in addition to these.

IR: Have you used any digital tools or resources to learn Dutch or other languages? How effective have these been?

GT: Digital devices are extremely helpful in learning the language. For example, social media videos in Dutch are very helpful. They help you understand when and how to use words and phrases. I download PDF files and read different resources online. Especially for refugees, you stay in camp while learning the language, so you won't have a chance to practice

the language with real people. The camps are located outside cities. So, the Internet can be helpful in improving your language skills by watching videos and so on. Also, there is an app called Duolingo that is very helpful.

IR: Have you encountered any challenges using digital technologies in the Netherlands, such as language barriers or lack of access to technology? How have you overcome these challenges, if at all?

GT: Language is a challenge obviously, but for me, I understand a little bit of English and that helped me a lot. So I translate Dutch content into English and I won't say I faced many challenges in that sense. But for people who don't understand English, maybe. But for refugees, for example, the website I mentioned earlier Kowa, they have a website available in different languages including Tigrinya. So, I didn't face much of a challenge in that sense.

IR: Do you use any online platforms or apps to connect with other refugees or people from your home country? How has this affected your sense of community and belonging in the Netherlands?
Have you had the opportunity to interact with Dutch people or participate in Dutch social events?
Have you used any digital tools or platforms to connect with Dutch people or participate in Dutch social events?

IR: Have you been able to find employment since arriving in the Netherlands? If not, what are the challenges you face in finding a job?

GT: I am not working at the moment actually. But the most challenging part I would say was getting a BSN. This is especially true at the beginning of the process. And without a BSN you can't work. The law said in the Netherlands, a person can get a BSN within six months of coming here. And you can be able to work. And as a refugee, while you are in the process, even if they give you a BSN you still can't start working. Because your employer has to request a tax number or something. So, if you are not a status holder, finding a job is very difficult. But once you become a status holder, you will be able to get your BSN and you can work. But still, you have to have the language skill, Dutch or English.

IR: Have you used any online platforms or resources to search for job opportunities?

GT: Yes, I search for jobs on LinkedIn, Indeed jobs, and Google search.

IR: Have you received any support or training to develop digital skills related to job search or job performance?

GT: No.

IR: Do you feel that digital skills are important in accessing basic services in the Netherlands? Have you used any digital tools or resources to help you navigate the Dutch system and access these services?

GT: Yes, digital skills are definitely important. I said before digitalization is getting into every sector. So definitely for someone with digital literacy, things and accessing services is going to be easier. And that will be totally different for a person with little or no digital skills. So, I use the banking app, Kowa, and IND websites because those are directly related to my immigration status in this country and soon. You need some service, you have to make an appointment, you have to read some information before you go, and you have to download or upload some documents. It is a lot of things that you have to do on the Internet. If you can't use well your phone, if you can't use social media you will face a lot of challenges.
IR: Have you faced any challenges in accessing basic services such as healthcare, education, or housing in the Netherlands?

GT: As I said, not much of a challenge. I try a little bit of English when I came here, and that helped me a lot. Also, I can say I am good at using my phone for different purposes, which also has been helpful for me. But I know a lot of friends face many challenges. There was this guy, it was when we first came here. He was telling me about his experience. He didn't know very well how to use Google Maps. They sent him a letter for an appointment with his lawyer. And he ended up in a different place and missed his

appointment. Stories like this are actually quite common. Even for people who can easily use their phones, understanding and navigating through the system can be difficult at first as a newcomer. For example, older adults, face many challenges using digital devices. For example, using Google Translate can be a very easy task. Or you would think so if you know how to use it. But a lot of people can't do it. So they would come and ask you to translate a post letter they received. When it comes to letters, by the way, we all face difficulties. The official letters are written in Dutch and that is quite challenging to understand. And many people don't have phones in camps. Some of them don't have phones, and some of us hid them because we hear they check everything on our phones and our online activities. I should talk about this I think. So, when you first come here, you are desperate and you want asylum. So, you do everything they ask you to do. They would ask for your phone, open the password and check everything that you have. That is including your online presence. That is scary, and you don't want anyone to look at your phone like that. But again, you are new, you don't yet know your rights so you have to do as they say. Because of that many people prefer to go without their phones. But that has its own consequences. Many people would have to navigate the system without having a phone. You can imagine how difficult that would be.

IR: Have you had any opportunities to attend digital skills training programs or workshops in the Netherlands? If so, can you describe your experience and how it has benefited you?

GT: No

IR: Are there any specific digital skills or areas of knowledge that you feel would be particularly valuable for your integration into Dutch society? Why?

GT: I think different people might have different answers, depending on what they want to do, and what they need. But for me being able to access websites, like signing up or logging in and then doing what they have to, I think this is very essential.

IR: What kind of support or resources do you think would be beneficial in helping refugees like yourself in the Netherlands improve their digital skills and enhance their integration?

GT: Training, training, and training. I told you earlier, even myself I have digital skills, I still need advanced skills. And unfortunately, I haven't come across refugee-specific training organized by the government or other entities. Individually, you may learn online on Coursera or Udemy but for refugees as a group, I have never seen any sort of training or support in this aspect.

IR: Is there anything else you would like to add or share about your experience with digital skills and integration?

GT: Thank you!